**Terms of Reference for an Internally Commissioned, External Mid-Term Review of the Africa RISING Project in the Ethiopian Highlands**

**1 Background**

**1.1 The Africa RISING Program**

As part of its Feed the Future Initiative to promote global food security, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting an innovative, multi-stakeholder agricultural research program entitled *Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation* (Africa RISING). This program’s goal is to identify and validate scalable approaches for sustainably intensifying production from some key, cereal-based farming systems in Africa that will improve the livelihoods (including nutrition, income, gender and social equity) of smallholder farmers whilst conserving or improving the natural resource base.

Africa RISING is a five-year program comprised of three regional projects that was launched in 2011.

The three projects are:

* Sustainable intensification of crop-livestock mixed farming systems in the Guinea-Sudan-Savanna Zone of West Africa – led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA);
* Sustainable intensification of crop-livestock farming systems in the Ethiopian highlands – led by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI);
* Sustainable intensification of cereal-legume-livestock integrated farming systems in East and Southern Africa – led by IITA.

The program brings together a wide range of research and development partners from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), national agricultural research and extension systems, farmers, private sector actors, and policy makers. The projects are working to develop management practices and technology combinations that integrate crop (cereals, legumes and vegetables), livestock (including poultry) and tree and shrub production more effectively within their target farming systems. These innovations are also being evaluated in the wider contexts of the landscapes in which they are practiced and the value chains that they form part of in order to facilitate wider scaling of the projects’ successes.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment across all three projects.

The rationale behind the Africa RISING program is described in detail in the [Program Research Framework](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/25079/ProgFramework2012.pdf?sequence=4) (PRF) document and implementation is organized around three research outputs:

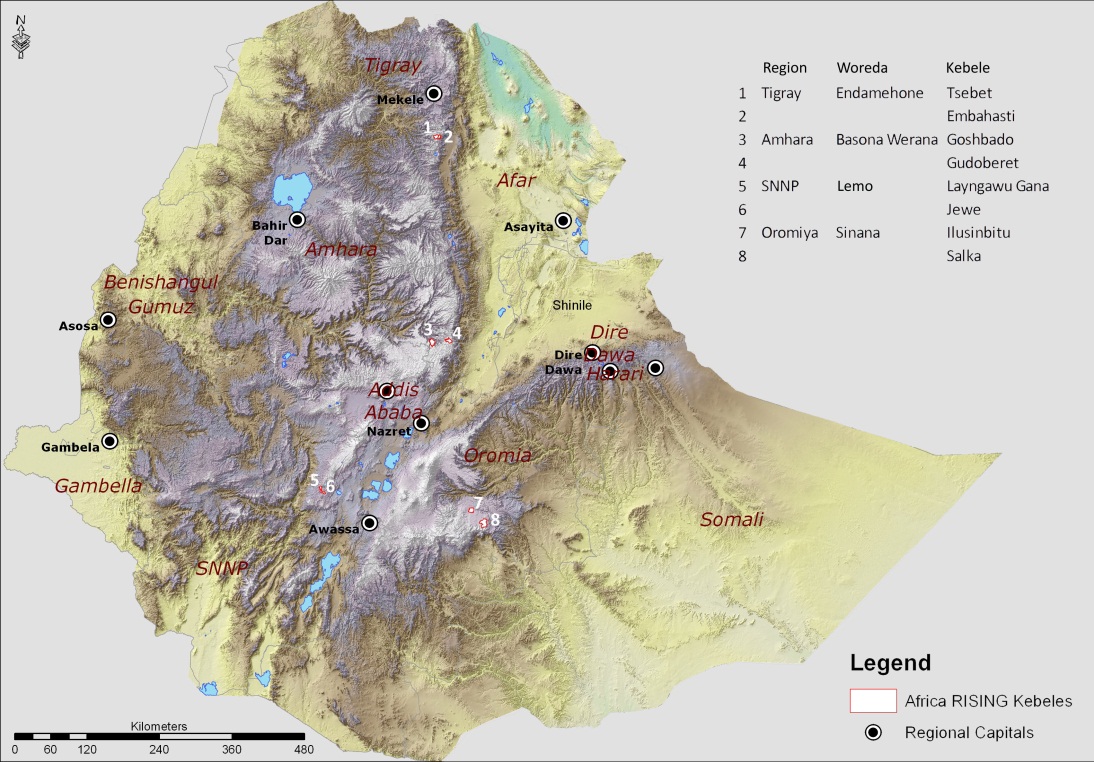
* Situation analysis and program-wide synthesis;
* Integrated systems improvement;
* Scaling and delivery of integrated innovation;

The first research output is intended to ensure that Africa RISING’s innovations address farmers’ priority constraints and to develop a program-wide synthesis that highlights the lessons learnt across the three projects for a wider audience. Research Output 2 is being delivered through a broad approach to participatory technology adaptation and combination to improve the productivity, income, and natural resource management of the program’s target systems. Research Output 3 will include approaches for scaling out systems innovations to similar development domains.

**1.2 Africa RISING in the Ethiopian Highlands**

*Geographical Location*

This project, managed by the ILRI, is currently centred on eight communities (kebeles) in the four main highland regions of Ethiopia; Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR) and South Tigray.



*Overview*

The main aim of the project is to identify and validate solutions to the problems experienced by smallholder crop-livestock farmers. Some problems arise from the difficulties facing farmers in managing natural resources and achieving efficiencies from managing crops, trees, water and livestock together. These efficiencies are often influenced by other factors such as access to inputs and the reliability of markets.

To address this complexity, Africa RISING takes an integrated approach to strengthen farming systems. It conducts participatory research that identifies technologies and management practices that work for farmers and take account of contextual issues like markets for inputs and outputs, community and other institutions and of the policy environments that influence farm households.

*Core Issues*

Highland kebeles are dominated by an integrated crop-livestock system that is a significant source of food and cash for the household. Major crop production challenges include a lack of improved seed, low and declining soil fertility, problems of pests, disease and weeds, a lack of draft power and equipment and the high cost or lack of agricultural inputs for all enterprises. These problems are compounded by increasingly erratic rainfall, drought, floods and land degradation. Key informants in Africa RISING kebeles have also raised concerns about lack of crop storage facilities, post-harvest pest and disease problems, lack of knowledge about processing with little or no access to processing equipment; all compounded by low market prices, inadequate access roads and poor transport facilities. Livestock-related problems include feed shortages, parasites and diseases, poor access to veterinary services leading to high animal mortality rates, compounded by a the poor genetics of available animals and inadequate watering points in many areas. Marketing challenges include low prices, having to sell when prices are low and a general lack of market information.

Major trends in crop production across the four Regions are mixed with some increases in planted areas and productivity resulting from improved market access and consumer demand. This has been the case for wheat, lentil and some vegetable crops. However, other crops such as barley, enset and potatoes are decreasing in area and yield due to low prices or disease problems. A severe lack of grazing and available fodder is leading to a decline in numbers of most livestock species, although poultry production is increasing in some kebeles.

A limited number of research and development (R&D) agencies and kebele-based organizations (CBOs) were identified during our diagnostic studies. These are dominated by Government (kebele and woreda administrations), kebele cooperatives and unions and some more recent government development initiatives. A few non- governmental organizations (NGOs) are operating at a local level but there appears to be little influence of private organisations at community level. A number of CBOs including men’s, women’s, mixed gender and youth groups have been identified, some operating independently but many requiring on-going support and capacity building. This includes the recent government 1 : 5 initiative based on the formation of groups of five farmers each being “adopted” by a lead farmer.

*Specific Research Focus*

The implementation of Africa RISING’s research in the Ethiopian Highlands is focusing on seven major research themes:

* Feed and forage development;
* Field crop varietal selection and management;
* Integration of high value products into mixed farming systems;
* Improved land and water management for sustainability;
* Improving the efficiency of mixed farming systems through more effective crop-livestock integration;
* Cross-cutting problems and opportunities;
* Knowledge management, exchange and capacity development.

These research themes are further elaborated in the project’s revolving [work plan](http://africa-rising.wikispaces.com/file/view/AR_ethiopia_workplan2014.pdf/501478088/AR_ethiopia_workplan2014.pdf). More detailed research protocols have been formulated by partners to address specific issues identified in the work plan.

*Expected Outcomes*

By 2017, the project will have delivered the following:

* Knowledge and skills in farming communities will have been strengthened equitably, allowing all family members to benefit.
* We will see farmers operating systems that are ‘sustainably intensified, that is, levels of production and productive efficiency have increased in ways that can be maintained both environmentally and economically over the longer term.
* Improved partnerships among farmers, support services and other value chain actors will have reduced uncertainties about market function; more reliable input supplies will support more resilient production that will ensure a more consistent profit from produce sold at market.

**2 Purpose of the review**

The overall purpose of this review – commissioned after extensive diagnostic studies and two field seasons – is to assess the performance of the project in terms of its implementation against the PRF and to provide recommendations, where necessary, on how to address significant deviations.

The review should include a consideration of progress towards achieving program objectives and the likely delivery against the outcomes specified in the PRF. Important research areas that are not, in the opinion of the reviewers, being adequately addressed should be highlighted and the relevance of the partnerships formed (both for research implementation and scaling) should be critically examined. The current management structure at the project level (but in the context of program management) and the capacity of human resources to implement the project should also be reviewed. Any data gaps and data handling and sharing issues as well as the implications of these for effective monitoring and evaluation (particularly for generating evidence of contributions to development outcomes) should be highlighted.

It is anticipated that the review teams outputs will provide some practicable indications that will assist Africa RISING in the Ethiopian Highlands management and partners to improve the quality of the research conducted and its relevance to wider development outcomes.

**3 Specific Evaluation Questions**

* What progress has been made towards the Africa RISING program objectives and outcomes?
* What can realistically be achieved within the given time frame?
* How relevant and feasible is the current research approach to achieving the three research outputs and the anticipated outcomes?
* What data gaps will compromise the scientific evidence of achievement for the three research outputs and the outcomes?
* What issues exist around data management and how can they be addressed?
* What research areas are missing or need to be strengthened?
* How adequate are the available human resources for the successful implementation of the project?
* What expertise needs to be strengthened or added?
* Are the current research and development partnerships adequate for a successful project?
* How effective are the collaborations, coordination, and working relationship among key partners?
* How relevant is the program and project management structure in terms of enhancing the implementation of the WA project?
* What lessons have key partners learned so far?
* How is the project contributing to the CGIAR’s Humidtropics research program;
* How should the science be further developed as the project continues; potentially into a second phase?

**4 Evaluation Approach**

The approach will include but does not have to be limited to:

* **Document Reviews:** selected project documents held at the coordination office as well as materials assembled by partners (e.g., baseline data, research protocols, data analysis documents, etc.);
* **Key Informant Interviews:** Africa RISING researchers in the Ethiopian Highlands, Africa RISING management, selected Program Coordination Team (PCT) and Science Advisory Group (SAG), ILRI DDG-Research and DG’s representative in Ethiopia, management of partner organisations, USAID staff in Washington, USAID mission staff in Ethiopia;
* **Focus Group Discussions:** with farmers engaged in the project and others at project sites, development agents and other change agents operating at site, innovation platform actors;
* **Stakeholder Analysis:** to determine the effectiveness of partnerships and institutional collaborations forged by the project;
* **Field visits:** to two project sites in the participating regions of the Ethiopian Highlands.

**5 Composition of the Evaluation Team**

The review team should consist of three acknowledged experts who, collectively, can cover the following issues as broadly as possible, preferably with some experience of the production systems of the Ethiopian Highlands:

* Mixed crop-livestock systems;
* Agronomy and cropping systems;
* Livestock production;
* Socio-economics, gender and value chains;
* Household agricultural production in a broader, natural resource management context;
* Managing multi-partner, agricultural research projects;
* Monitoring and evaluation of complex agricultural research projects.

**6 Deliverables**

The review team will submit the following deliverables:

* Short presentation of interim findings for the debriefing meeting;
* Draft report, of not more than 50 pages, detailing the findings of the review and recommendations for comment from the Africa RISING team;
* Final report of not more than 50 pages.

**7 Timing of the Review**

This is currently indicative and will be negotiable, to some extent, depending on the availability of the team.

* Document reviews: early March 2015 – 4 days;
* Key informant telephone interviews: early March 2015 – 1 day;
* Travel to Ethiopia to meet with further key informants and conduct field visits: late March 2015 – 10 days;
* Presentation of interim findings and debriefing meeting in Addis Ababa: early April after field visits – 2 days;
* Draft Report: by mid April 2015 – 4 days;
* Final Report: by end April 2015, 2 days

**8 Logistics**

The Africa RISING team in ILRI will be responsible for all logistics.

**9 Documents Required by the Team**

* [Program Research Framework](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/25079/ProgFramework2012.pdf?sequence=4);
* Project document with regional log frame (in preparation);
* [Rolling work plan](http://africa-rising.wikispaces.com/file/view/AR_ethiopia_workplan2014.pdf/501478088/AR_ethiopia_workplan2014.pdf);
* Project research protocols;
* Technical reports to the donor;
* Other project reports and publications;
* List of key partners;
* Links to the project [wiki](http://africa-rising.wikispaces.com/program) and [web site](http://africa-rising.net).